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after one reading -

# Account of the Conversion of Robt. French -

## Indian Territory -

Muskogee - Indian Ter^y
Nov. 18th 1881

You ask me for some account of Robt. French the father of Mollie & Josie, little Cherokee girls, who are now pupils under the care of Prof. Bartlett at Maysville Tennessee.

My first knowledge of him began during the Winter of 74-75 when I was just entering upon my mission work among the Cherokees at Ft. Gibson. I only thought now & then I saw him during the next two or three years. My real acquaintance did not commence until the Autumn of 77.

Living on the flat-boat at the ferry of the Grand River opposite Ft. Gibson - one day I encountered him. He sat upon an old grey horse. Clad in shirt & pantaloons which were lodged at the bottom upon the legs of his Mexican spurred boots - while at the hips they were gathered & held about his waist by a cartridge belt, from which hung the inevitable revolver, while from under the broad brimmed slouch hat that had once been white hung a mass of long black hair. He had a long stock-whip from which I inferred that he had been gathering up cattle. To my salutation he replied by saying - "Well Parson why dont you never preach over in our neighborhood?"

"For several months I had been preaching in a settlement some ten miles distant passing near where he then resided. To this inquiry I replied, "you have no preaching place or school room in your neighborhood." "However if I find some place I will give you a sermon when I return from my appointment next month." Into this heavily wooded tongue of land located between the Grand & Verdigris Rivers both of which emptied into the Arkansas a couple of miles away. Were gathered quite a number of half breed Cherokee families who had little intercourse with others outside. Whether rightfully or not somebody had fastened upon this locality the name of "Thieves' Bend."

Long before the appointed hour some 40 people had gathered at Bob's house - and fearing lest it had been forgotten - and they should suffer disappointment - he rode away to town to see the preacher & ensure a service in a neighborhood no which there had no sermon been preached since before the war.

We met at the ferry & on my invitation he accepted a seat in my buggy - & on the way partly by way of explanation & apology he said - "You see that we have had a pretty hard ruckus over in our neighborhood & I thought we ought to do something to mend it."

At the next appointment he was unexpectedly absent. In January - on account of storm & mud I found no one present - but this afforded an opportunity for a plain & practical conversation which discovered that he was quite in earnest in the matter of his own salvation - since he declared that he was both reading his bible & praying for help to understand his duty.

In Feb. he was present but as a prisoner in the hands of guards, under arrest for the killing of a neighbor.

He had been gathering cattle on the Prairie south as he was returning home after dark, passing near the Butler store

at Ft. Gibson. A drunken man accosted him crying out "Who are you?" He replied giving his own name and asked the same question in turn. Who are you? The reply came with an oath, "none of your business" followed by shot after shot in rapid succession - one of which passed through his clothing and another through his arm.

Dropping upon his heels he awaited the next shot and fired at the flash of the revolver in the hands of his unknown assailant which took fatal though not immediate effect.

As this had been done in the darkness, he hastened away to find dressing for his own wounds without knowing until the following day that he had been attacked by an old neighbor with whom he was on friendly relations - and although this neighbor when sober wholly exonerated him from blame - yet he was nevertheless a prisoner and at his own house to hear the gospel that day - With what intense eagerness can never be forgotten.

As the case was so clearly one of self defence, the Grand Jury found no bill of indictment and he was discharged.

The release probed the occasion for a debauch, but as we hope, it was his last.

He was soon induced to take the pledge, which to most of those who knew him, was deemed a freak or just to be broken upon the first temptation. To a few there appeared the earnestness of purpose as evidence - about this time a man who had stabbed another in an affray at Muskogee fled to this bottom for a hiding place. It was not long after this that some one accidentally discovered him with Bob concealed behind an old building, sitting down and in most earnest conversation. Bob having a book in his hand to which he was occasionally referring the other. That book was the Bible and he was endeavoring from it to set forth arguments which should lead his companion to abandon his wicked life.

In April a weekly prayer-meeting was established at the request of the people of the neighborhood and at his house. At these meetings he was present, always an interested listener but though he could not be prevailed upon to take any active part in them, yet his efforts in behalf of his old associates to induce them to abandon their old habits of life were unremitting.

To the amazement of all he stood firm against the tremendous temptations which beset him. Yet he seemed to find no assurance of his own acceptance until Midsummer when in the midst of his neighbors and friends - beside his old mother and his wife too feeble to stand - he stood up and confessed his faith in Jesus as his Savior, and his purpose to serve Him, then turned and presented his six children for baptism - the eldest then about nine years old.

As truth is stranger than fiction, so the news of his reform travelled faster than his misdeeds and was far more incredible. At Ft. Smith a few days later, a soldier from Ft Gibson was interrogated by a former acquaintance of Bob's respecting the matter. When assured of the fact that he had not only signed the pledge, but had on the last Sabbath united with the Church, his astonishment knew no bounds "Come with me" he said - For several years you know he spent on the Western plains, and for several more he rode over the Territory as a Deputy U.S. Marshal, having head quarters at Ft. Smith.

They hurried down the street to a room that had been used for a dance hall, turning in here he went up to the side and placing his fingers in his lobes blew three or four

inches apart he said excitedly "Do you see those holes? Well on a certain night we were having a "Stag dance" here and Bob sat there" pointing to the place "with his revolvers crossed on his back, getting for a set to dance. Some one having offered an insult to a friend of his. Bob grasped a revolver in each hand and with a spring and a whoop he discharged both at once at the man, cutting a gash on both sides of his neck and entering the wall just there" said he "and I saw it done. Had the aim been a half an inch either to the right or left the shot would have been fatal".

This incident was in keeping with the wild and desperate life he had led, since near the close of the war. The day that I met him at the jury room invited to preach to the first that I had seen him for more than a year, Bob he had killed a man at Muskogee on a drunken spree on account of which he had counted for more than six months. Previous to his life on the plains he had shot five men in three months here in the Territory.

After his return his life was chiefly spent as a Deputy Marshal or in the business of introducing whiskey.

For two years he has held the office of High Sheriff of the Cherokee Nation having charge of the national jail and prisoners, and during that time it is probable that he has spilled more whiskey than has ever been spilled in the Cherokee nation since the treaty of '66 which forbade its introduction. Since his appointment in this capacity it has been a matter of remark that no murder has been committed at Tahlequah during either of the annual sessions of Annual

Quite a number of the prisoners have been hopefully converted and admitted to membership in the Baptist and M.E. Churches of Tahlequah since his administration. Of the permanency of that work I cannot speak, but reflecting himself it may be said that he has been enabled by the Grace of God to stand thus far. Yet as strange and overdrawn as this story may appear, still it would seem to be impossible to overstate the strength of the temptations and the bitterness of opposition which this firm purpose to maintain a pure life and to discharge his duty as an officer has brought to bear against him. Knowing something of these things may I not ask that whoever may hear or read this account will pray that he may be kept by the power of God through faith unto Salvation?

(signed) Jamb A. Woodard

Indian Work—
Indian Territory—

Comanche &
Kiowa Agency
Indian Territory
Aug. 1st 1881
Rev. J. A. Brodhead
Rev. 81—

Please return to
Mrs. J. & H. Harris